The NICHD Connection

May 2020

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

<u>creating optimism, rurpose,</u>	- 1
<u>IN</u> tent and <u>G</u> oals: New	
COPING Series from The	
Office of Education	
Letter from the Editor	2
The Pomodoro Technique: An	6
Effective Time Management	
Tool	
Looking for Virtual Learning	7
Opportunities?	
Clinical Corner: Clinical	10
Fellowship During a Pandemic	
The Rep Report	11
May Announcements	13
May Events	17

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<u>Creating Optimism, Purpose, IN</u>tent and <u>G</u>oals: New COPING Series from The Office of Education

The coronavirus pandemic has left many fellows in a state of pause—without precedent for guidance. But while benchwork may be on hold, you can still make progress during your time as an NIH trainee. The COPING (Creating Optimism, Purpose, INtent and Goals) series is designed to be a beacon light to help fellows navigate their way and create a positive outlook during this difficult time by encouraging a forward-looking approach with attainable goals.



In our first set of articles, Drs. Erin Walsh, Triesta Fowler, and Yvette Pittman of the NICHD Office of Education each address a COPING concept. Dr. Erin Walsh provides welcomed **optimism** by reminding fellows of the range of opportunities still available from home. Dr. Triesta Fowler addresses the reality that not everyone has an easy work-life balance when both work and family life converge in one location, requiring time management with **purpose**. And Dr. Yvette Pittman encourages self-advocacy with **intent**, allowing you to reach your personal **goals**.



NEW VIRTUAL COFFEE FIX SESSION ON SELF-ADVOCACY VIA ZOOM June 10, 10-11 AM

The NICHD Office of Education will circulate Zoom connection details soon

Three voices. Three perspectives. Three articles to help NICHD fellows make use of their extended time at home. This is no doubt a stressful phase for everyone, but with a little planning and a lot of patience, you have an opportunity to accelerate both your career and personal development.

(continued on page 3)

Letter from the Editor

"So much we can't control, but we can control what we do with our time," said Dr. Sharon Milgram, Director of NIH Office of Intramural Training and Education, during her "Home Edition" chat with NIH Director Dr. Francis Collins. During their 30-minute discussion, Drs. Collins and Milgram covered the many ways NIH is supporting trainees staying at home during the coronavirus pandemic. If you haven't had a chance to listen in, check it out to learn about the support systems set up for summer interns, postbacs, graduate students, postdocs, and principal investigators.

The NICHD Office of Educations is also working hard to support our NICHD fellows. This month, Drs. Erin Walsh, Triesta Fowler, and Yvette Pittman discuss several ways fellows can use time at home to work on self-awareness and career development activities. Non COVID-19 related research is on pause, but your personal development doesn't have to be.

In the remainder of this special issue of the newsletter, you'll find encouraging words from <u>leadership</u>, <u>clinical</u> <u>fellows</u>, <u>your postdoc rep</u>, and <u>your colleagues</u>. We are all here for you, to help guide and support you during this unprecedented time.

I think Dr. Collins said it best: "This is something we'll get through...Science is what moves us forward and gets us ahead, and [you're] a part of that enterprise."

Your Editor in Chief, Shana R. Spindler, PhD

Please send your questions, comments, and ideas to our editor at **shana.spindler@nih.gov**.



New COPING Series from The Office of Education

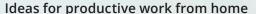
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Finding Optimism While Teleworking as an Early-Career Scientist BY ERIN WALSH, PHD

Since March 16, when the NICHD Office of Education began teleworking full-time, I've experienced a swarm of emotions: of course, fear that I or my loved ones would get sick; anxiety and frustration at the idea of trying to accomplish my work while fraught with fear; uncertainty; cabin fever; and on a more positive note, calm and content on beautiful spring days while relaxing at home without a single interruption from the outside world. Importantly, it has been comforting to know that I am not alone in experiencing this roller coaster of feelings.

While recently perusing *Science* online, I came across an article that I thought would be of interest to our NICHD trainee community. The article, "How early career scientists are coping with COVID-19 challenges and fears," highlights the personal accounts of 11 early-career scientists as they tackle this upprecedented research slow-down

career scientists as they tackle this unprecedented research slow-down, along with strategies they have used to acclimate to the situation. Below, I have summarized a few tips you may want to consider for your own remote work and downtime.



- » Set up a designated workspace in your home—if possible, spruce it up with inspirational art/decorations.
- » Focus on reading the literature, writing reviews, planning future projects, writing grant applications, or completing online courses (what a great time to finally learn some bioinformatics!).
- » Work on data analysis and create new figures for manuscripts and/or posters.
- » If appropriate, incorporate career planning and innovative ideas into your lab's virtual lab meetings.
- » Talk to your supervisor/mentor regularly and be honest about your productivity—discuss ideas such as writing a review, and don't be afraid to ask your mentor for ideas.
- » Stay up to date on the news but try to limit your daily exposure in order to reduce anxiety.
- » Take advantage of wellness activities, such as those being offered by the OITE (see <u>Announcements</u> and <u>Events</u>).

(continued on page 4)



Erin Walsh, PhD

New COPING Series from The Office of Education

(continued from page 3)

children or other family members.

Tackling Work-Life Balance with Purposeful Time Management BY TRIESTA FOWLER, MD

The Cambridge Dictionary defines work-life balance as "the amount of time you spend doing your job compared with the amount of time you spend with your family and doing things you enjoy." However, work-life balance has taken on a new meaning amid this global pandemic. Work and home have merged into one location. Principal investigators and trainees in science and medicine will have to halt some of their research efforts and perform others remotely from home. This is a significant unprecedented adjustment to business as usual. The transition is further complicated by the demands of homeschooling and caring for

So, although it may be difficult to do, there must still be a balance between working and living at home. One way to begin is to get a clear understanding of your workload and the associated daily responsibilities. At the same time, create a similar list of things that need to be done at home. Make sure to include meals and breaks. Then have a discussion with a spouse/partner and children to determine what is the best way to manage the day. Do not make the schedule too rigid because home life can be unpredictable. If a reasonable schedule cannot be determined, consider negotiating with mentors and colleagues about daily tasks or projects. Make these requests as soon as possible to avoid compromising due dates and timelines.

Daily self-care is essential to managing the responsibilities of work and home along with the stresses of this difficult time. Activities that cater to your mental, emotional, and physical health are critical for your own well-being. Be creative and purposeful about securing time for yourself in the schedule. Keep the communication channels open with mentors and colleagues, cherish the time with family, and never forget the importance of making time for yourself.

Work-life balance within the same space will be overwhelming and difficult to attain. Take it one day at a time, acknowledging that some days will be better than others. But with purposeful management of your time, you will find a work-life balance that works for you—all in one location.

(continued on page 5)



New COPING Series from The Office of Education (continued from page 4)

Meeting Your Professional Goals: The Importance of Self-Advocacy BY YVETTE PITTMAN, PHD

Advocating for yourself is a skill we often avoid or just do not think about. When you hear the word "self-advocacy," you might feel uncomfortable, as though self-anything is a form of boasting or bragging. But this is not the case. Self-advocacy is not only 100% necessary for your professional development, it could be the key to a new career opportunity.

There are many ways to approach selfadvocacy, and it will look different for everyone. However, the process should always begin with reflection and selfawareness. It is important to first know yourself and what you want because no one will know what you need better than YOU! In other words, what are your goals, values, and passions? Self-advocacy is making sure your needs and interests are known—when you are true to yourself, it is so much easier to express your needs to others. One of the most important points to remember is that you should respect the needs of others while expressing what you need. Being proactive and assertive, but not aggressive, is always a plus—this is much easier when it is linked to your passions and interests.

Self-advocacy takes various forms. For example, you might want to volunteer to give a departmental lecture to become more visible to your colleagues—an essential element to advancing your career. Whether you're dealing with large career-changing issues or need

clarification from a recent discussion with your supervisor, self-advocacy is making sure others are aware of your needs and interests.

There are many benefits to practicing self-advocacy, including:

- » building self-confidence
- » communicating better with your colleagues
- » addressing inequalities
- » enhancing your problem-solving skills
- » managing conflict

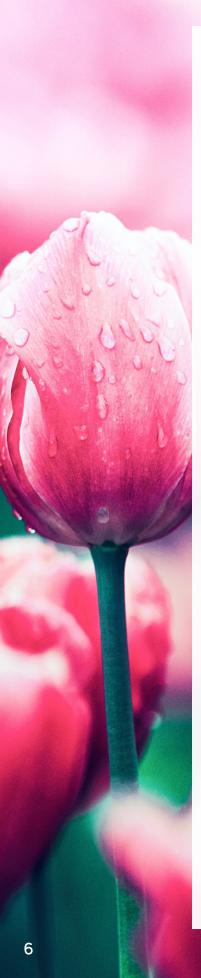
The last point, managing conflict, is an area where self-advocacy is particularly important. Many times, we avoid conflicts or difficult conversations, which is certainly not good for our professional growth. What's most important is to always listen and respect the perspective of our peers and mentors. If something is not clear from a discussion, ask questions. If you need help, ask for it! There is a misconception that speaking up is disrespectful or displays defiance. But it's the opposite. Speaking up is an opportunity to communicate effectively, express what your needs are, and this empowers you. Remember it's okay to disagree—we can learn from each other.

The more you practice self-advocacy, the more likely it will become your natural reaction to life's circumstances. And right now, life's circumstances are likely to require a little self-advocacy.





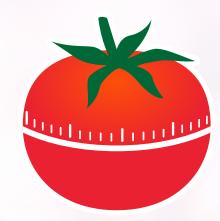




The Pomodoro Technique: An Effective Time Management Tool

By Amrita Mandal, PhD

Getting things done on time is the goal for many of us. Nothing gives as much joy as ticking off items on the "To Do" list at the end of a work day. But let's accept that it's hard to complete tasks in an unprecedented time like now, when many of us are learning to work from home while caring for family members, or in isolation without the relief of social interactions common in a work place. If this sounds familiar to you, perhaps the Pomodoro technique could come in handy.



The Pomodoro technique is a simple yet effective tool for focused work with planned breaks in between. Francesco Cirillo coined the term "pomodoro," which translates to tomato, in the late 1980s after the tomato-shaped timer he used as a university student. So, how does it work? Let's break down a pomodoro interval step by step:

- 1. Choose your assignment/work to do
- 2. Set the timer to 25 minutes
- 3. Work until the timer rings
- 4. Take a five-minute break
- 5. Take longer breaks (15 to 30 minutes) for every four pomodoro intervals

It helps to plan how many pomodoro intervals you need in a day to finish your tasks. Complete the required number of intervals and, voila, you have accomplished your work within a preplanned timeframe. Use your break time to take a short walk, check on a family member, call a friend, stretch, meditate, deep breathe, doodle, refill your water bottle or do anything that makes you happy.

Now, in actual practice, the 25-minute work/5-minute break may not work for you. In that case, find a time frame that does work. The idea is to break bigger tasks into smaller ones with uninterrupted focused work, followed by breaks to relax your mind. Regular breaks are important to do efficient work. After you finish each pomodoro, you will feel a sense of accomplishment. You will also gain a blueprint of your productivity.

To set the time, a kitchen timer is recommended to avoid digital distractions, but there are plenty of apps available. Once you find your timer of choice, focused work with planned breaks might help limit distractions and check off a few more items on that "To Do" list.

Looking for Virtual Learning Opportunities?

The NICHD Office of Education has been on the hunt for virtual opportunities to help overcome the limitations of telework during the coronavirus pandemic. Please find the list of upcoming FAES online courses and workshops, BioCareers webinar, and ABRCMS webinars.

If you are interested in registering for one of the courses and there is a cost associated with the registration, please reach out to the Office of Education about covering the cost.

THE FOUNDATION FOR ADVANCED EDUCATION IN THE SCIENCES (FAES)

All Spring 2020 in-person courses have been converted to online courses. *Registration for the Summer 2020 term opens April 20.*

FAES May, June & July 2020 Online Workshops

https://faes.org/workshops-conferences

May 26–29	BIOF 075 Metagenomics Data Analysis
June 2–5	BIOF 079 Variant Analysis
June 9–12	BIOF 074 Advanced Transcriptome (RNA Seq) Analysis
June 17–18	BIOC 062 Image Processing and Analysis
June 22–25	BIOF 096 Rosetta for Molecular Modeling and Design: Hands-on Training
July 8–10	BIOF 098 Statistical Analysis using R
July 13-16	TECH 072 Science and Technology Policy Analysis
July 14–17	BIOF 087 Programming for Biomedical Researchers
July 21–23	BIOF 090 MATLAB Fundamentals
July 21–24	BIOF 077 Molecular Modeling and Molecular Dynamics
July 27–31	BIOL 055 Genome Editing with CRISPR
July 28-31	BIOF 045 Bioinformatics Analysis of Next Generation Sequencing Data

(continued on page 8)

Looking for Virtual Learning Opportunities?

(continued from page 7)

THE YEAR-ROUND ANNUAL BIOMEDICAL RESEARCH CONFERENCE FOR MINORITY STUDENTS (ABRCMS) EXPERIENCE WEBINARS

This series covers a range of topics on professional skillset and scientific development, writing abstracts, and preparing for graduate school. *Offerings are complimentary due to grant funding. Registration is required.*

ABRCMS Educational & Research Journey Webinars

https://www.abrcms.org/index.php/education-training/student-webinars/item/545-education-research-resources

"Getting Meaningful Research Experience in the Time of COVID-19"

Tuesday, May 19, 2020, 6 p.m.

Simply having a research experience is only the first step. The skills, knowledge, and relationships that you gain from that experience is what matters in the end. With many programs not offering research experiences this summer, how can you still get the benefits of a research experience? This series will give you resources, activities, and strategies to consider for remote summer research opportunities.

"Leveraging Your Summer Work in Preparation for Graduate School Applications"

Tuesday, June 16, 2020, 3 p.m. and 6 p.m.

For trainees applying to graduate schools in fall 2020, this session will identify tasks for the summer, describe choosing a program, review application strategies, and discuss how to gain an advantage.

"Writing a Compelling Abstract"

June 18 and 19, 2020, 6 p.m.

Review ways to formulate your abstract to be as compelling as possible. Topics include the essential elements of an abstract, good examples of abstracts, presentation of data in abstracts, and crafting a coherent narrative.

(continued on page 9)

Looking for Virtual Learning Opportunities? (continued from page 8)

ABRCMS, CONTINUED

ABRCMS Mentorship & Career Journey Webinars https://www.abrcms.org/index.php/education-training/ student-webinars/item/546-mentor-career-resources

"Network Your Way to Success in STEM"

Tuesday, June 23, 2020, 3 p.m. and 6 p.m.

Introduces trainees to the basics of networking and the importance of having and utilizing your network. Will focus on skills that trainees can gain through experiences at academic meetings and conferences.

BIOCAREERS

https://biocareers.com

Free Webinar: "The Job Search Process: What Companies Look for When Evaluating Talent"

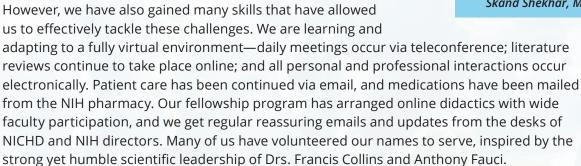
Wednesday, May 20, 2020, 1-2 p.m.

Clinical Corner: Clinical Fellowship During a **Pandemic**

By Skand Shekhar, MD

"Please reschedule all clinic patients" is the message that marked the beginning of a transition for us in early March, when the NIH decided, rightly so, to postpone all elective patients. Much has changed since then—COVID-19 has been declared a pandemic, more than a million people have been infected, and a third of humanity has stayed home.

As a physician, this has been a unique, once-in-a-lifetime circumstance, reminiscent of ominous plagues that we read about in medical school and a stark reminder of the limitations of modern medicine. As a postdoctoral trainee, it has presented other challenges. Many of us feel increasingly lonely with our families being far way. Some of us are scrambling to meet stringent deadlines for manuscript and grant submissions. And others have simply had to shut shop at their wet labs.



New research opportunities have presented themselves too. For example, I have been given the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues across the globe on projects investigating the relation between endocrine disorders and COVID-191, which not only contributes to the global COVID-19 effort but also enhances my knowledge of research techniques.

As we pray for those affected and our frontline workforce, it is important to remember that this too will get behind us, just like Ebola, H1N1 and Spanish flu did. What should remain is the memory of the lessons we learn. We will have clearer skies and brighter tomorrows at the "National Institutes of Hope."

REFERENCES

1. Shekhar S and Hannah-Shmouni F. (2020). "Hookah smoking and COVID-19: Call for Action." Canadian Medical Association Journal 192(17):E462. doi: 10.1503/cmaj.75332.





The Rep Report

By Anshika Jain, PhD

As the current NICHD Basic Sciences Institutes and Centers (IC) Representative, I represent NICHD postdoctoral fellows at the Fellows Committee (FelCom) meeting every month and share the latest news with you here.

Do you have a concern or question that you want brought up at the next meeting? Contact me at anshika.jain@nih.gov!

FelCom welcomes the following newly elected committee liaisons:
Animal Research Advisory Committee (ARAC) Liaison:
Dr. Jessica Taubert, NIMH
Women Scientist Advisors (WSA) Committee Liaison:
Dr. Sara Young-Baird, NIGMS

All Career Development Subcommittee panels and Visiting Fellows Committee meetings are suspended until further notice.

Beginning Monday, March 23, the NIH Intramural Research Program was shifted towards minimizing the physical presence of staff in NIH laboratories, such that only mission-critical functions will be supported on campus. These measures were taken to ensure the safety of the NIH workforce, maintain mission-critical functions and avoid loss of resources—but purposefully is not intended to support initiation of new experimental programs. Also, please note that for ongoing animal experiments, staff will continue to care for animals, but no new animals should be ordered.

It was announced by the OITE that non-FTE, particularly trainees, are not eligible for the United States Public Health Service (USPHS) call for civilian deployments related to the on-going COVID-19 response.

(continued on page 12)



Anshika Jain, PhD



May Announcements

POSTPONED: ANNUAL NICHD FELLOWS MEETING

The 16th Annual Meeting for Postdoctoral, Clinical, and Visiting Fellows and Graduate Students has been postponed until **Friday, October 23, 2020**. This year's retreat will be held at The National Museum of the American Indian.

This meeting will allow you to step away from the lab for a day to network with your NICHD colleagues, participate in a career exploration session, and learn more about the recent developments in our intramural research programs. More details to follow!

NEW VIRTUAL COFFEE FIX SESSION ON SELF-ADVOCACY VIA ZOOM

The NICHD Office of Education will host a new "Coffee Fix" on **June 10 from 10–11 a.m.** via Zoom. The inaugural "Coffee Fix" on work/life balance was a great success, and next we look forward to discussing topics related to self-advocacy. Zoom connection details will be circulated soon!



Please contact Ms. Monica Cooper (**cooperm@mail.nih.gov**) in the Office of Education if you are planning to attend.

GAIN PROGRAMMING SKILLS WHILE TELEWORKING FROM HOME

During this time of extended telework, the NICHD's Bioinformatics and Scientific Programming Core (BSPC) is offering to help fellows gain valuable programming and data analysis skills. BSPC can provide several resources for learning the R programming language as well as develop custom learning plans using online resources to meet specific learning goals.

You can start learning the R programming language directly in a web browser at https://rstudio.cloud/learn/primers. If you want to progress further, you can use the free online book https://r4ds.had.co.nz as a guide.

If you are interested in programming and data analysis, please contact Dr. Ryan Dale at ryan.dale@nih.gov. He can work with you directly or coordinate with others in BSPC to schedule "virtual office hours" to help you understand how these skills fit into your research or to help with installation issues and coordination with IT.

(continued on page 14)

May Announcements

(continued from page 13)

WANT TO WRITE AN ARTICLE WHILE WORKING FROM HOME?

The NICHD Connection has several writing opportunities for fellows in all stages of their careers—no experience required!

We are seeking fellows to contribute feature articles and articles for our regular columns, such as:

EVENT RECAPS – Our event recaps provide short summaries of workshops and seminars—perfect for fellows who couldn't attend.

HOT OFF THE PRESS – These feature articles cover recent publications, allowing fellows to practice writing about complex topics for a general scientific audience.

INTERESTING OPPORTUNITY – The first-person narrative of this column gives fellows a first-hand peek into various opportunities around campus and in our community. Consider sharing any interesting opportunities *you've* experienced.

LIFE OUTSIDE LAB – Send us pictures of your life outside lab!

THE ARTS – Once per year we focus on art in science. Interested in exploring the topic? Try writing a feature article for this annual issue!

THOUGHTS OF A POSTBAC – This column has served as an outlet for postbacs to share their thoughts about scientific training and future career opportunities.

YOUR IDEAS – We're always on the hunt for fun, interesting ideas to cover in the newsletter!

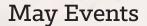
Please contact *The NICHD Connection* Editor, Dr. Shana Spindler, at **shana.spindler@nih.gov** to learn more.

(continued on page 15)









MAY 18, 20, & 22

"The Business of Science: How to Land Your First Job" by SciPhD A new training for fellows and graduate students preparing for their professional career transition

SciPhD will offer a series of three 90-minute live webinars that cover:

- » Finding jobs
- » Analyzing job ads to determine your skill match and qualifications
- » Developing experience statements and accomplishments that demonstrate your qualifications
- » Generating a draft formatted targeted resume
- » Preparing for the interview process

WEBINAR 1 Monday, May 18 Job Types, Critical Skills, Your Brand

WEBINAR 2 Wednesday, May 20 Flamingo Training, Finding a Job,

Analyzing a Job, Am I Qualified?,

Targeted Resume

WEBINAR 3 Friday, May 22 Networking, Applying, Interviewing,

Landing the Job

In addition, each participant receives their own individual license to SciPhD online web application Flamingo® that allows you to put into action the skills you learn in the webinar. Import a job ad, use Flamingo®'s Job Analytics Engine to identify critical skills, and generate a targeted resume.

SciPhD has worked with over 120 institutions over the past eight to ten years on preparing thousands of academic scientists to successfully transition to professional careers.

If you would like to sign up for these live webinar sessions, please contact Ms. Monica Cooper at cooperm@mail.nih.gov.